

Eventually
Something

WILL
STICK

Grocery List

- ☐ spaghetti noodles
- ☐ spaghetti sauce packet
- ☐ can diced tomatoes
- ☐ green pepper
- ☐ can tomato paste
- ☐ onion

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The first meal my mom taught me to make growing up was spaghetti. My mom usually taught me the "right" way to do things. However, she also taught me that throwing spaghetti noodles at our tile backsplash until they stuck was the best way to check whether the pasta was done. ("The best way" being the way that adds the most joy to your life.)

Spaghetti dinner was a consistent staple of my childhood diet. It was quick and simple, though never quite as simple as boiling noodles and heating a jar of sauce. Ground

beef was involved, along with onions, peppers, and even mushrooms if we had a can of them in the cupboard. Spaghetti sauce represented an opportunity to creatively reuse leftovers from earlier in the week, or to supplement with whatever was cheapest at the grocery store. The rare occasion of adding meatballs to the spaghetti sauce *du jour* felt like a luxury.

Most TV cooking shows won't feature this take on spaghetti, but many working and middle-class gourmet cooks will know it well.

This is an ode to this simple pasta dish, to supermarkets, and a summer full of eccentric road trips.

What is Spaghetti?

Technical experts may disagree, though spaghetti is a loose concept more than a specific dish. In its most basic form, spaghetti (the dish) pairs noodles with a tomato-based sauce. Spaghetti noodles are the most common type of pasta used, though this can be substituted with almost any type of pasta. Thicker pasta types like fettuccine or penne usually hold up better.

spag•het•ti

[/spəˈɡet.i/] noun

1. *Pasta*. a white, starchy pasta of Italian origin made in the form of long, thin strings
2. *Dish*. an Italian dish consisting largely of spaghetti (pasta), typically with a tomato sauce featuring other vegetables and a variety of meat

As with many things in life, the real secret is in the sauce. Spaghetti sauce always contains tomatoes in some form, and it may contain any combination of spices, vegetables, and/or meat:

Vegetables: they can be fresh, frozen, or from a can. The most common inclusions are onions, peppers, mushrooms, and olives. Many vegetables pair well with tomato sauce, though. The tomato constituent of the sauce also tolerates experimentation. One way includes using different tomato varieties such as cherry, stewed, or sun-dried tomatoes.

Meat: the carnivores out there may choose to include ground meat or meatballs. Ground beef, turkey, or pork sausage are the most common choices. Adventerous souls can use nearly anything, including something as unique as salmon or shellfish.

Seasonings: a bouquet of "Italian" spices truly bring the sauce together. These can include garlic, oregano, basil, rosemary, thyme, and black pepper. Those looking for a little kick may consider adding red pepper flakes to their sauce, too.

Q: What do you call a fake noodle?
A: An impasta!



Spaghetti is Long Pasta

All squares are rectangles, but not every rectangle is a square. Like this, all spaghetti is pasta, but not every type of pasta fits into the category of spaghetti. Spaghetti is a category of pasta comprised of long rod-shaped and ribbon-shaped noodles. The spaghetti category includes noodles as small as capellini pasta, all the way up to lasagna noodles.

Types of Spaghetti Pasta

- Capellini (or "angel hair")
- Spaghettini (or "thin spaghetti")
- Spaghetti
- Vermicelli
- Linguine
- Tagliatelle
- Fettuccine
- Pappardelle
- Bucatini (or "perciatelli")
- Lasagna

Note: Long pastas have several distinct forms, and most forms have multiple names attributed to them due to regional variation through time.

Pasta Fresca vs. Pasta Seca

While most long pastas lend themselves to fresh preparation (*pasta fresca*) the majority of Americans enjoy pasta that has been dried (*pasta seca*). Besides the obvious difference in the way the pasta is prepared before serving, dried pasta is primarily made from durum semolina flour and water, while *pasta fresca* is made from "00" or all-purpose flour and eggs.

Spaghetti: A History

Antiquity

Versions of pasta were known in antiquity by the Etruscans, who were ancient inhabitants of modern-day Italy. Their pasta - which they called *laganon* - started as thin sheets similar to lasagna that were dried and used as a shelf-stable food source for travelers.

Middle Ages

The idea of cutting pasta into thin strips has a debatable origin. Thin noodles were common in China for centuries before their emergence in Europe. There is a myth that Marco Polo contributed the idea after his travels to China, though it is more likely that Arab traders brought the idea to Europe before Marco Polo ever set foot in Asia.

1521

Spanish conquistadores found tomatoes in Mesoamerica and introduced them to Europe upon their return. Europeans were initially skeptical of tomatoes and thought they were poisonous. At the time, tomatoes were almost exclusively eaten by the aristocracy, who tended to use pewter dinnerware with a high lead content. The acidity of tomatoes made that lead leach from their dinnerware, causing dinner guests to die from lead poisoning.

1700's

Tomatoes gained popularity in Italy later. The first record of tomato sauce paired with pasta comes from a cookbook called *L'Apicio Moderno* by Francesco Leonardi in 1792.

Around the same time, bolognese sauce also emerged. Bolognese is a type of *ragù* sauce, which is simply any sauce with meat in it. The first record of a *ragù* sauce comes from Imola, Italy at the end of the 18th century after it had been adapted from a stew called *ragòut*.

Post-WWII

At the end of WWII, British and American soldiers stationed in Italy took the dish home and got to work popularizing and adapting it to their local tastes. The result is what we called spaghetti bolognese today - or oftentimes, just "spaghetti".

Shopping for Ingredients



My Spaghetti Origin Story



I grew up in a working-class household in Colorado in the late 1990s and early 2000s. My upbringing had a distinctly midwestern flavor to it owing to my family's agricultural roots in eastern Colorado. My culinary zeitgeist through the age of eighteen included a lot of quick, weeknight "meat and potatoes" sort of dishes. The sort that could make the most of canned or boxed ingredients since they were cheaper than fresh items. This is to say that I ate my fair share of casseroles growing up, and ranch dressing was a default setting.

In college, I lucked into enough scholarships and financial aid to cover my tuition, but I worked in my university's dining halls to cover rent and living expenses.

The job itself lacked glamor, but my time in the back kitchens exposed me to ingredients and cooking methods that felt genuinely fancy. I spent hours wrestling with steaks the size of my head to sear grill marks into them ahead of finishing them in the convection oven. I was introduced to *sous vide* cooking and how to make hummus from scratch in bulk quantities. One time, the head chef handed me a cracker smeared with duck pâté from a catering event to try. And I realized it was okay to make a sandwich with something nicer than store-brand sandwich bread and Kraft singles.

My adult life now - the one with an office job and benefits that would have completely altered my family's existence growing up - exists at the precipice of these worlds. It takes work to learn how to blend into the middle class. I shop at farmer's markets sometimes, and I occasionally meal prep side salads in mason jars. I also don't automatically reach for the store brand of everything anymore. Even still, my spaghetti recipe is pretty much the same as the way my mom taught me.







Grocery Shopping

I served in AmeriCorps the year after I graduated college. For the uninitiated, AmeriCorps is like the Peace Corps, but places volunteers throughout communities in America. The "pay" for volunteering is abysmal, so a lot of AmeriCorps members jokingly refer to the program as "AmeriPoor".

My year of service brought me to Sacramento, CA. I was lucky to be placed in one of the most agri-

culturally productive areas of the nation since it meant fresh fruits and veggies came cheap. I was also eligible for SNAP benefits at the time.

Even still, I had to bargain shop for groceries as much as I could, often walking through the store with a calculator in one hand to check whether I could afford everything I wanted. I learned a few things that year:

You can gauge the affluence of a neighborhood by whether the local Walmart checks receipts on the way out of the store.

A well-stocked spice rack is the difference between chicken & rice every night and burritos, curry, or any number of other dishes. Spices at supermarkets are expensive, though they can be cheaper at ethnic or discount grocery stores.

Discount grocery stores always seem like the dingiest places. Not because they are less clean, but because the stores are usually dimly lit with dark concrete floors and bulk palettes towering around you. Conversely, the average supermarket glistens with shiny tile floors, neatly organized shelves, and produce sections alight in a warm fluorescent glow.

A coupon for a free rotisserie chicken feels like winning the lottery. Never underestimate the versatility of rotisserie chicken.

Shopping at stores with names like Grocery Outlet, Food Source, or Grocery Depot drives home the feeling of groceries as a generic commodity for those who don't have better choices.

SNAP benefits also allow you to buy pre-prepared deli foods, so long as they have not been heated by the store. You can exploit this loophole by paying for a Papa Murphy's Take 'n' Bake pizza with your EBT card. (If the location accepts EBT.)

Grocery Store Tourism



The evening after I got my driver's license, my parents gave me the unprecedented freedom of taking the family car to get ice cream at the Baskin Robins near our house. I had a coupon I'd earned from the public library's summer reading program to use. I blasted my favorite Green Day CD on the way over and got a scoop of butter pecan ice cream in a sugar cone.

What I didn't tell my parents was that I also ducked into the Korean grocery a few storefronts down, dying to see what was inside after driving past it thousands of times over the years. That began my casual pastime of grocery store tourism.

Every time I saw an ethnic grocery store, a fancy natural grocer, or stopped in a small town, I couldn't

resist wandering the aisles. The stores looked so different than the supermarkets where I shopped regularly.

I usually had the feeling that the store wasn't intended for me as I was surrounded by products I couldn't readily identify. But I loved that small rebellion, imagining all the versions of a life where I did need something I could only find at that store. I enjoyed seeing the products and services offered that would have seemed out of place in a regular grocery store (which were obviously there to meet the needs of the community the store was intended for).

Mostly, I was happy these stores existed, if only to counter the sameness of every other supermarket.





The Price of Spaghetti

After a decade of adult life, I took my grocery budget for granted. Some prices changed regionally as I moved around the country, and my budget grew as my income did. Still, as if to spite my retail confidence, Oscar Wilde was right when he said, "Nowadays, people know the price of everything and the value of nothing."

Starting in 2020 in the wake of the COVID pandemic, forces like supply chain disruptions, work-force safety, and federal economic policy set inflation in motion. Prices increased drastically, and shopping became a disorienting activity. Trying to gauge whether a particular item was overpriced left me second-guessing myself against the tide of increasingly expensive daily goods and services.

This summer, I wanted to recalibrate my sense of a "good deal". To meaningfully compare stores to each other with an homage to the basket of goods

The Crazy Spaghetti Lady

Throughout the summer of 2023, I set out to record the price of spaghetti ingredients at grocery stores throughout my part of the Pacific Northwest. My "study" fails any measure of objectivity. Instead, this exercise reflects the way I learned to shop growing up, with an eye toward price above all else. After a summer of grocery store-laden road trips, this is some of what I learned:

the Consumer Price Index (CPI) uses to measure inflation, I settled on an exercise of shopping for the most primeval recipe in my repertoire: spaghetti.

SPAGHETTI DINNER	
4 servings from 269 grocery stores in OR, WA, ID & MT	

CASH RECEIPT	

Description	Price
Spaghetti Noodles	\$0.81
Spaghetti Seasoning	\$1.32
Ground Beef	\$5.00
Green Bell Pepper	\$1.20
Onion	\$0.75
Canned Diced Tomatoes	\$1.34
Canned Tomato Paste	\$1.06
Grated Parmesan Cheese	\$0.38

MEAL TOTAL \$11.86	
Total/Person \$2.97	



For more detailed information on the entire "study", please visit this webpage using the above QR code.

My Basket of Goods

These ingredients result in approximately 4 servings of spaghetti dinner:



Spaghetti Noodles

Eight oz. of uncooked regular spaghetti noodles, price/oz. Spaghetti is a shelf stable staple, so I "bought" the largest container I could find.



Spaghetti Seasonings

One 1.5 oz. sachet of spaghetti seasoning spices, priced/unit.



Ground Beef

One lb. ground beef, price/lb. Ground beef with a 20% fat content (80/20) was typically the cheapest. I considered packages up to 3 lb. since that is a fair amount to store/freeze beyond what the recipe needs.



Onion

1 onion, price/lb. Yellow or white onions were the cheapest onions, though Walla Walla Sweet Onions were cheaper during parts of the season.



Canned Diced Tomatoes

One 14.5 oz. can of diced tomatoes, price/unit. Though larger cans were often for sale, I chose the quantity that would make one batch of sauce.



Green Bell Pepper

1 green bell pepper, price/unit. Green bell peppers are often cheaper than other colors of peppers.



Canned Tomato Paste

One 6 oz. can of tomato paste, price/unit. This small can is fairly standard, and makes one batch of sauce.

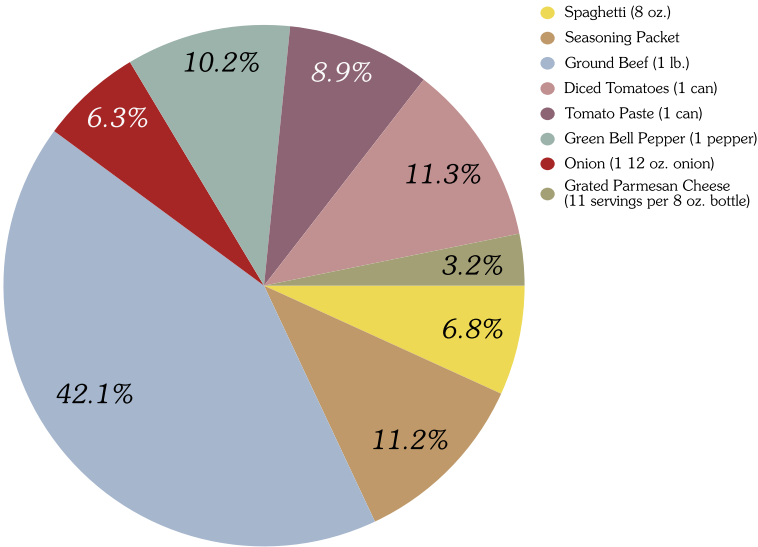


Grated Parmesan Cheese

Eight tbsp. of grated parmesan cheese, price/oz. I "shopped" for an 8 oz. bottle of grated parmesan cheese, which is the goldilocks size that balances price economy with the expiration date. A bottle contains 45 servings of cheese, 2 tbsp. each.

"Executive Summary"

Average Cost - Spaghetti Dinner Ingredients



Number of Stores Visited: 269

Number of Communities Visited: 143

Average Price of Spaghetti (4 servings): \$11.86

Median Price of Spaghetti (4 servings): \$11.12

Most Expensive Spaghetti:
Capella Market in Eugene, OR

Cheapest Spaghetti:
Win Co Foods in Wenatchee, WA

Most Inconsistently Priced Ingredient:
Spaghetti Sauce Seasonings

"Study" Methodology

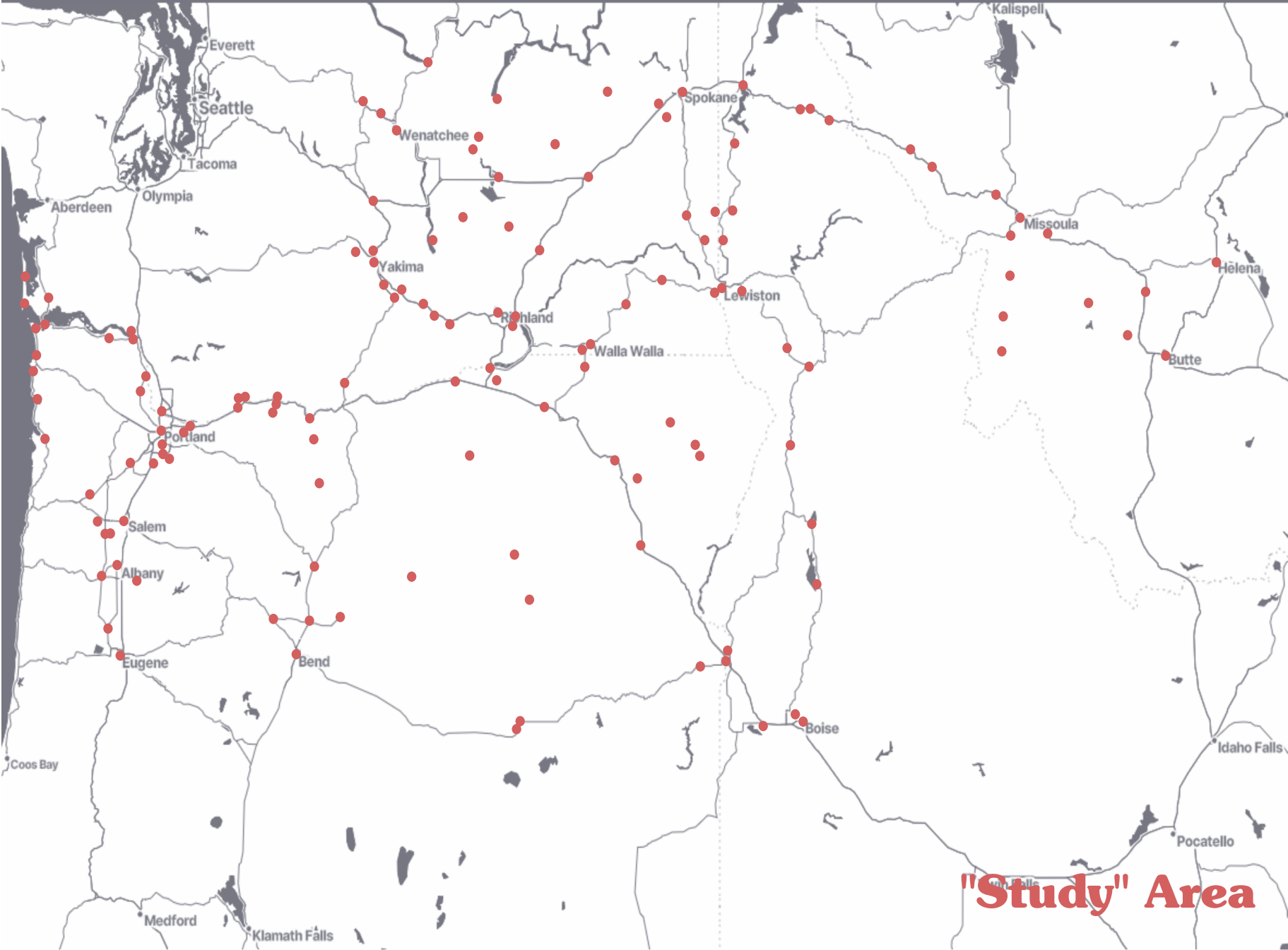
The objective was to leave the store with the ingredients to make spaghetti.

Shopper Rules

1. Chose the cheapest option on a price-per-weight basis
2. Total brand agnosticism (e.g. I didn't care which brand of pasta I "bought".)
3. No type preference (e.g. I did not choose organic over non-organic produce.)
4. Reasonable quantities of perishable items (e.g. I looked at up to 3 lb. quantities of ground beef.)
5. Considered sales and club card pricing
6. (Didn't consider coupon deals or clearance/"last chance" pricing)
7. Substitutions were allowed if the store did not carry an ingredient (e.g. I "bought" grated parmesan cheese from the deli section if they did not have the shelf-stable variety.)

Store Rules

1. Visited a variety of store types in communities within a 3-hour drive of my house, and throughout other regions in the Pacific Northwest
2. Tried to visit any "unique" grocers in a community (e.g. natural grocers, bargain grocers, general stores, ethnic grocers)
3. Visited at least one major chain store, if available
4. Did not include grocery stores missing >1 ingredient from the shopping list



"Study" Observations

Idaho levies a 6% sales tax on all goods, including groceries. They are one of 13 states that tax grocery items. Idaho offsets this with a \$100 per person per year income tax credit. (However, assuming someone spends \$50/week on groceries, they pay \$168/year in sales taxes.)

(Oregon and Montana do not have a sales tax on anything. Washington does not tax grocery items except soda and processed foods.)

The design language of grocery stores is precise, down to the placement of items on shelves. For example, canned tomato paste and grated parmesan cheese are almost always on the top shelf, while spaghetti noodles are waist-height or lower.

Grocery stores that don't offer baskets or small carts make shopping really inconvenient for single people.

When did supermarkets phase out those tanks full of live lobsters in the meat department? (It's okay. It's probably a better life for the lobsters.)

Stores that sell Catholic devotional candles put them in seemingly random places in the store.

Most stores that have those red \$0.50 toy and sticker machines are all located in rural and less affluent areas.

Based on a random sample of 214 onions, the average onion weighs 12 oz.

I am too short to see the prices of items on the top shelves in Safeway stores because of the angle of the tags.

Many supermarkets try to avoid weighing in on the debate of whether a tomato is a vegetable or a fruit by stocking the canned tomato products in their own area entirely.

Urban vs. Rural Stores

What is an Urban Area?

Defining "urban areas" is a subjective endeavor, with organizations using different definitions focused on variables like population or the number of housing units. In the Pacific Northwest, towns of about 10,000 people or more tend to have enough goods and services available locally that residents can meet their daily needs without leaving town. These areas are populated enough to have some economic autonomy from the surrounding areas.

The definition of "rural" is everything else.

Variable	Rural Communities	Urban Communities
Average Spaghetti Dinner Price	\$12.21	\$11.84
Median Spaghetti Dinner Price	\$11.76	\$11.76
Average Price Variation of Ingredients between Stores	37.00%	50.71%

On average, the cost of spaghetti in rural grocery stores is 3.13% more expensive than it is for shoppers in urban communities. Still, the greater variation in the recorded price of spaghetti dinner among urban stores likely resulted from the grocery stores sampled in this "study", which favored expensive specialty stores or economical chain stores that exist in urban areas. On the other hand, rural communities have comparatively few options, and those stores tend to be more expensive overall.

Chain Stores

Grocery stores are seldom truly independent businesses. Large chain grocers, department stores, and bulk retailers like Costco set the standard for the choice and price point most consumers expect. Individuals in rural communities even regularly drive an hour or two to a larger town to shop somewhere like Walmart.

By comparison, shopping at neighborhood or community stores with smaller selections and higher prices happens only when the need for convenience outweighs the price or if no other choice exists. Consequently, grocery stores that survive usually fall into one of three operating categories:

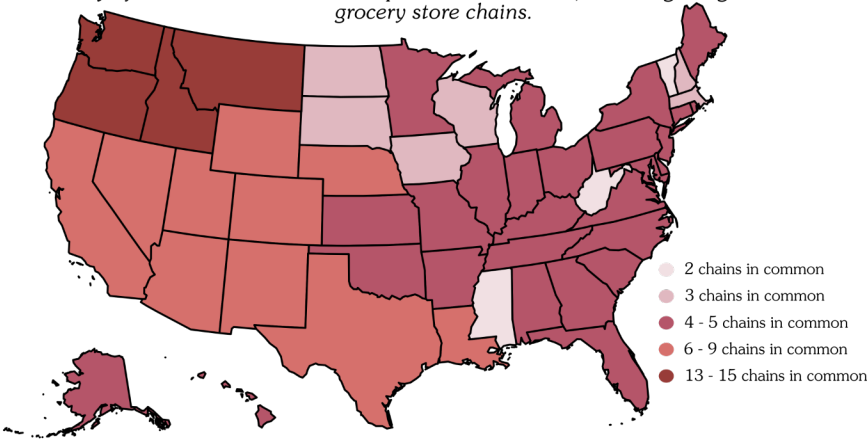
Chain Grocers: these stores are all wholly owned by one company. Smaller chains may operate regionally, like Rosauers Supermarkets which has stores in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana. Conversely, some large companies either directly operate stores throughout most of the United States (like Walmart) or own multiple chains that operate most places (like Safeway & Albertsons, which are under impending ownership by Kroger).

Grocery Co-operatives: sometimes, independently owned stores join co-operatives, which unite stores together to allow for bulk ordering that helps lower prices at individual stores, or gives access to generic brands which can be cost-competitive with larger retailers.

Grocery Store Franchises: some stores operate under a franchise model, where independently owned and operated stores are allowed to use a trademarked brand in exchange for royalties. This benefits the store through brand recognition, and may include resources like marketing materials, store decor, and even certain exclusive brand offerings. Some smaller chains operating this way include Grocery Outlet Bargain Market (a west coast discount retailer), or the Independent Grocers Alliance (IGA) which operates worldwide, usually in small markets.

Regional Grocery Chains

Although many grocery store chains are owned by larger corporations, the individual brands often operate regionally. Within the "study" sample, there were 24 chain store brands represented, 18 of which had locations in more than one state. This map shows how many of those multi-state chains operate in each state, revealing a regional trend in grocery store chains.



Safeway and Albertsons were the two most common grocery store chains represented in the "study" sample, including 63 stores between the two chains. Overall, Whole Foods sold the most expensive spaghetti on average at \$22.44 for four servings. Win Co Foods was the cheapest, with four servings of spaghetti costing only \$8.21, on average.

Dollar Discount Stores

One common feature shared by both inner-city neighborhoods and many remote and rural areas is a lack of options to purchase fresh, quality meat, dairy, and produce. These areas are typically referred to as "food deserts". One phenomenon exacerbating this problem is the increasing prevalence of discount dollar stores such as Dollar General, Family Dollar, and Dollar Tree. These chains are expanding rapidly into working-class neighborhoods and small, rural communities. They typically offer a wide variety of products, including a small selection of grocery items. However, these grocery items tend to carry mostly shelf-stable and processed frozen foods, with a severely limited selection of fresh foods. Furthermore, these stores often open within blocks of existing small grocers, threatening and ultimately causing many of them to go out of business. This further limits options for people who often need it most.



The Consumer Price Index

At its core, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) measures the change in price of a list of goods and services over time in metropolitan urban areas throughout the United States.

Types of CPIs

There are actually many “flavors” of the CPI calculated, which cross-reference information such as geographic region or demographic information with certain parts of the basket of goods. The most popular versions are:

CPI-U measures the change in price experienced by all urban consumers

CPI-U-W measures the change in price experienced by all urban consumers who live in a household where >50% of the income comes from wage-related or clerical work (excluding groups like retirees). This version informs Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increases for programs like Social Security.

Core CPI measures the change in price experienced by urban consumers, excluding food and energy expenses. These items tend to be more volatile on a monthly basis than the rest of the basket of goods.

The Basket of Goods

The CPI “basket of goods” includes over 200 specific items in eight broad categories:

- Food & beverages
- Housing
- Apparel
- Transportation
- Medical care
- Recreation
- Education & communication
- Other goods & services

Some of those items include both butter and margarine, women’s dresses, prescription drugs, tires, and postage.

Change in Price

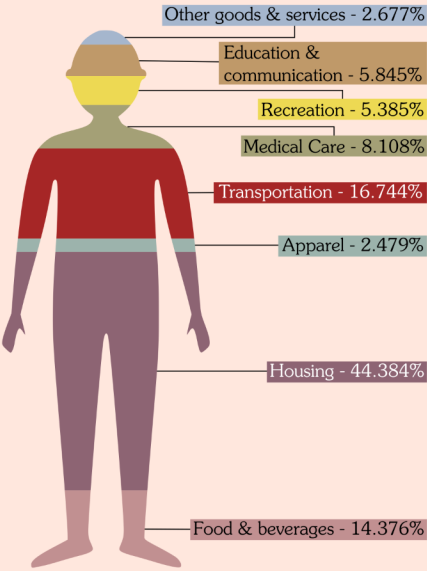
The information collected for the CPI does not capture the price of individual goods/services at one static point in time very well. Instead, the CPI is meaningful in comparing the average price changes between specific time periods. It is also useful for showing how different geographic regions or household types experience price changes relative to one another. The CPI compares the price of goods and services in the basket of goods against what they were in the anchor years, currently 1982-84.

What Goes into the CPI?

On a consistent basis, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics surveys retailers, utility providers, and landlords to determine the average price of the basket of goods & services. They survey some items monthly, along with surveying the whole basket of goods in the New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago metropolitan areas. Smaller metro areas are surveyed bi-monthly.

Those average prices are weighted based on a composite of consumer spending habits that depends on which type of CPI they are calculating. These weight values are determined through a separate program called the Consumer Expenditure Survey, which tracks randomly selected consumers’ spending habits for a period of two weeks and compiles the information to determine what percentage of a household’s income is spent on particular goods or services.

The Composite Consumer



One example of the weighted values used to calculate the CPI. Based on urban consumer spending averages from the December 2021 Consumer Expenditure Survey, U.S.Bureau of Labor Statistics

Changes in the Price of Spaghetti

Recipe Item	CPI Category	February 2020 Unadjusted CPI Index	September 2023 Unadjusted CPI Index	% Change February 2020 to September 2023
Spaghetti	Rice, pasta and cornmeal	239.446	294.714	23.1%
Spaghetti Seasonings	Sauces and gravies	142.018	183.010	28.7%
Beef	Uncooked ground beef	276.504	355.019	28.4%
Onion	Other fresh vegetables	339.797	371.354	9.3%
Green Bell Pepper				
Canned Tomato Sauce	Canned vegetables	172.637	230.546	33.5%
Canned Tomato Paste				
Parmesan Cheese	Cheese and related products	236.598	265.149	12.1%
All Foods		261.876	324.704	23.99%

The CPI base year (1982-84) index number is set at 100.00. This makes it easy to see prices increases from that year. For example, uncooked ground beef is approximately 255% - or 2.55 times - more expensive in September of 2023 than it was in 1982-84.

All information taken from CPI-U archive, U.S. Brueau of Labor Statistics.

Dumb Little Treats



I am a sucker for those red trinket machines outside some stores. I can't resist the urge to feed a couple of quarters into the slot and turn the crank to buy myself something that can only be described as cheap junk. After visiting so many grocery stores, these were the spoils of my journey:

- 1.** Orange sticky/stretchy lizard
- 2.** Yellow sticky hand
- 3.** Green plastic dice
- 4.** Tiny green rubber dinosaur
- 5.** Small pink rubber pig
- 6.** Purple plastic alien playing basketball
- 7.** Yellow rubber duck eraser
- 8.** Yellow rubber crying poop emoji
- 9.** Temporary tattoo sheet of a psychedelic panda and some flaming dice
- 10.** Temporary tattoo line drawing of an airplane flying around the globe

- 11.** Sticker of Lucky Poops (spoo of Lucky Charms)
- 12.** Yellow & green swirl bouncy balls
- 13.** Surfer penguin dress-up sticker set
- 14.** Ring featuring a beetle (the insect)
- 15.** Temporary tattoo of a sexy zombie



How to Make Spaghetti

The Recipe for Spaghetti



In all truth, this is a recipe for a drastically simplified version of true Spaghetti Bolognese, or spaghetti with a meat sauce. But growing up, I'd never known it by any other name than simply "spaghetti". So, like a properly cooked noodle to a wall, I'm sticking with it.

Ingredients

- 8 oz. dry spaghetti
- 1 packet spaghetti seasonings
- 1 diced onion
- 1 diced green bell pepper
- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 can tomato paste
- 1 3/4 cup water + water to boil pasta
- Grated parmesan cheese

Prepare Yourself Including, but not limited to:

- Use the restroom.
- Put on comfortable clothes.
- Pour something nice to drink.
- Put on some good music.
- Mentally prepare yourself to make a lovely dinner.

Prepare Your Ingredients

- 1.** Gather the ingredients you will need to make your spaghetti dinner.
- 2.** Dice a green bell pepper and an onion into medium-sized pieces.



- 3.** If your spaghetti noodles are full (regular) length, break them into half so they will fit nicely into the pot.

Getting Saucy

4. In a large skillet, add onions and ground beef and begin to brown the beef over medium-high heat. Once it is browned, you can choose to drain off any grease into a disposable, heat-safe container to cool before you throw it in the trash. Never pour grease down the drain!*

5. Add green peppers, the spaghetti sauce seasoning packet, the can of tomato paste, and your can of diced tomatoes (undrained) to the pan. One tip to easily get the tomato paste out of the can is to open the can from both ends and use one end to push the paste through the can and out. Also, add the additional 1 3/4 cup of water to



the sauce. The easiest way to measure this is to use your emptied diced tomato can since it holds just about that much liquid.

6. Bring the sauce to a low boil, reduce to medium-low heat, cover partially with a lid, and simmer for about 15 minutes. This is a good time to start your pasta.



* Pennywise the clown isn't the only scary thing in sewers. Pouring grease down your drain can cause your own pipes to clog. Worse yet, grease from food also wreaks havoc on local sewer systems by contributing to the creation of something called fatbergs, which are masses of non-dissolvable solids like cooled fats and "flushable" wipes that band together to create blockages in the pipes. Additionally, I recommend against searching for an image of a fatberg. They are gross.

Using Your Noodle

7. Fill a large saucepan or stock pot with enough water to fully submerge your pasta, plus about 2" of additional water. This amount will depend on the pot you use. When in doubt, a pot that is too big is always a better option than a pot that is too small.

8. Add a pinch of salt to the pot of water and set it to boil on the stove over medium-high heat.

9. Once the water has reached a rolling boil, add pasta and stir. As it is boiling, be sure to stir the pasta occasionally to prevent the noodles from sticking together. (Especially when you first add the pasta.)

10. After about 4 minutes, the pasta will relax into flowing noodles and may be nearly done. Keep an eye on the pasta at this point, using a fork to bring individual noodles up out of the water to test. You really can throw the noodles at any vertical,

smooth, non-porous surface like tile or glass. If they stick, that is a good indicator the pasta is done. A more accurate and dignified approach is to extract a couple of noodles from the pot and let them cool for a few seconds before biting down on them. The noodles are done when the "crunch" is gone and there is only a little resistance left. This is cooking pasta *al dente*.

11. Once the pasta is done, remove it from the stove and drain the water off using a strainer or colander. Do not "rinse" the pasta with more water.



Serve your sauce over the noodles on large plates or in shallow bowls. Make sure forks are available. Set parmesan cheese out for individuals to use to their taste. Bon appétit!

Extra Ingredient Suggestions

In addition to the ingredients already suggested in this recipe, some of the best things to consider adding to your spaghetti if you have them on hand include:

- Canned mushrooms
- Fresh squash like zucchini
- Fresh basil
- Canned olives
- Minced garlic



Beyond Spaghetti

In the event you are left with too much spaghetti sauce, do not view it as a tragedy. Instead, too much spaghetti sauce can be the beginning of great things - specifically, the beginning of great leftovers. Use your spaghetti sauce as a palette to supplement with other ingredients you may already have to create several simple dishes.

1. Simple Leftovers: Make more spaghetti noodles and enjoy a second time.

2. Chili or Soup Base: Combine the leftover spaghetti sauce with ingredients like beans, spices, and additional canned tomato/hamburger to make chili to your taste.

3. Personal Pizza(s): Make personal pizza crusts from pizza dough or by using pita bread. Add a base of spaghetti sauce, along with any additional desired toppings and shredded cheese, and bake.

4. Sloppy Joes: Warm hamburger buns. Spread spaghetti sauce onto bun, and enjoy.

5. Meatball Sub: Add cooked meatballs to spaghetti sauce. Spread onto a hoagie bun or other thick bread, and top with mozzarella or swiss cheese. Toast the sub to melt cheese.

6. Stuffed Peppers: Prepare a bell pepper by cutting the top off and removing all seeds. Combine spaghetti sauce with cooked long grain rice and stuff mixture into hollow bell pepper. Top with shredded cheese and roast in the oven.

7. Casserole Base: Add spaghetti sauce to a greased casserole dish along with spaghetti noodles, corn, other desired vegetables, and a healthy amount of shredded cheddar cheese. Cover with tin foil and bake.

In addition to using your spaghetti sauce immediately, you can also freeze the leftovers. Let the sauce cool completely before adding it to a container such as a freezer bag, tupperware, or glass jar. You can freeze the sauce in quart-sized freezer bags out laid flat to make storage easy. If you choose to store your sauce in a glass container, make sure to leave a 1/2" of space at the top to allow for expansion as the sauce freezes. Store for up to 6 months.

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Side Dish Suggestions

While spaghetti can be a whole meal unto itself, you can truly elevate this simple dish with the side dishes you offer. Here are a couple of suggestions for quick and easy sides that traditionally pair well with spaghetti dinner in many working-class and moderately Midwestern households:

"Garlic Bread"



Ingredients:

- 8 pieces white sandwich bread
- 4 tbsp. stick margarine
- 2 tsp. garlic salt

Instructions:

1. Move oven rack to the center of the oven and preheat to 200° F.
2. Put margarine in a microwave safe container and microwave in 10 second bursts until it is completely melted.
3. Add garlic salt to melted margarine and stir to combine.
4. With a pastry brush, coat one side of each piece of bread with the margarine and garlic salt mixture.
5. Arrange the coated garlic bread onto flat cookie sheet and place in oven. Bake for 15-20 minutes, or until bread is lightly toasted. Remove from oven and serve.

Simple Side Salad



Ingredients:

- 1/4 head of romaine lettuce
- 1 roma tomato
- 1 green bell pepper
- Ranch dressing

Instructions:

1. Remove the center heart from the lettuce, and chop leaves into medium-small pieces, approximately 1.5-2" in size.
2. Coarsely chop tomato and green bell pepper.
3. Add tomato and bell pepper, to the lettuce in a medium-sized bowl and gently toss together.
4. Serve with bottle of ranch.

Drink Pairings: Spaghetti pairs well with something cool and refreshing like iced tea, or soda - preferably a dark cola. If you want to feel truly fancy, one of my friends says this meal would pair well with a nice Chianti wine.

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Spaghetti Dinner (serves 4)

Ingredients:

- 8 oz. dry spaghetti
- 1 packet spaghetti

Seasonings

- 1 diced onion
 - 1 diced green pepper
 - 1 lb. ground beef
 - 1 can diced tomato
 - 1 can tomato paste
 - $1\frac{3}{4}$ cup water + water to
- boil pasta
- Grated parmesan cheese

① Brown ground beef in a skillet over medium-high heat.

Drain grease.

② Add onions, green pepper, spaghetti seasoning mix, tomato paste, diced tomatoes, and $1\frac{3}{4}$ c water to skillet. Lower heat and simmer until sauce thickens, approximately 30 minutes. Stir occasionally.

③ While sauce is simmering, fill a large pot $\frac{3}{4}$ full of water. Boil water and add spaghetti noodles. Stir occasionally, and cook until al dente.

④ Drain water from the pasta, and set aside until pasta sauce is done.

⑤ Serve the sauce atop the pasta, garnishing with grated parmesan cheese to taste.



About the Author:

Lora Elliott is a nerdy urban planner and compulsive crafter residing in Pendleton among the wheat fields of Eastern Oregon. Her creative work primarily exists at the intersection of film photography and book-binding, especially if maps or graphs are involved. Her favorite things include drinking iced tea at her beloved local cafe, long drives back roads, pictures of baby goats in sweaters, and sharing a wealth of terrible puns with the world.

(She also feels the need to be honest about the fact that spaghetti isn't her favorite food, contrary to this zine's topic. Her favorite food is chicken shawarma.)

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This zine documents a lifelong affair with spaghetti and the trajectory of several road trips during the summer of 2023 that brought Lora to 269 grocery stores throughout Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana.